

SWIMMING POOL FACT SHEET

Risks of swimming pools at child care homes



The use of swimming pools in home child care settings could facilitate the transmission of infections among children and cause serious disease, and also present risk of drowning and injury.

- In Minnesota, we are particularly concerned about the potential for the enhanced transmission of *E. coli* O157:H7. This bacteria is passed in stool and is readily transmitted among children when contaminated hands or toys are placed in the mouth or contaminated food or water are consumed. Pools can easily become contaminated with stool.
- Infection with *E. coli* O157:H7 is the primary cause of hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), the most common cause of kidney failure in children in this country. This syndrome usually involves prolonged hospital stays and is fatal in up to 5% of cases. During 2000-2001, 4 Minnesota children (ages 1 – 6 years, all previously healthy) died as a result of HUS.
- Each year several *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreaks are identified in Minnesota in both child care homes and centers. These outbreaks often cause a disruption of parents' schedules and income for the child care provider because infected children need to be excluded from child care until they are no longer carrying the bacteria, which can take as long as 1 – 2 months. Several other disease-causing agents, including *Giardia*, *Cryptosporidium*, and *Shigella* are also efficiently transmitted in wading pools. All of these agents can cause severe illness in children and are common in Minnesota. In 2000, hundreds of cases laboratory-confirmed infectious diseases were reported to the Minnesota Department of Health, including 1,227 persons with *Giardia*, 1,079 with *Campylobacter*, 904 with *Shigella*, 612 with *Salmonella*, 216 with *E. coli* O157, 197 with *Cryptosporidium*, and 197 with viral hepatitis A.
- The transmission of these infections can occur even under the care of the most diligent and thoughtful child care providers as the infections can be spread even with mild symptoms. The Center for Disease Control has more information regarding safe swimming at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming/faq/swimmers.htm>

Swimming Pools Present the Risk of Drowning or Other Submersion Incidents

- The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) warns that young children can drown in small amounts of water, as little as two inches deep. Submersion incidents involving children usually happen in familiar surroundings and can happen quickly, even in the time it takes to answer the phone. In a comprehensive study of drowning and submersion incidents involving children under 5 years old, 77% of the victims had been missing from sight for 5 minutes or less. The Commission notes that toddlers in particular often do something unexpected because their capabilities change daily, and that child drowning is a silent death; there is no splashing to alert anyone that the child is in trouble. The CPSC has more information at <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prereel/prhtml102/02169.html>

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- Primary factors in risk of drowning and near-drowning injury for children are access to pools and supervision. Pool bottoms with steep drop-offs can be a risk to non-swimmers who inadvertently get into deep water. Above - ground pools pose a different risk for drowning than below - ground pools because visibility may be blocked by pool walls, increasing the likelihood of a delay in discovering unsupervised pool use, or pool users in trouble. Also, pool drains can trap hair if not properly shielded. Many drownings have occurred because of hair entrapment. Fencing may be the biggest factor, however, in controlling unsupervised access to the pool.
- There are National Healthy & Safety Performance Standards Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs for swimming, wading and water at the following web site: <http://nrc.uchsc.edu/national/5-4.html#wq>. These are prepared by the National Child Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, which is funded by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.